

from Donald Mackenzie

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THE REAL MACKAY

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ONE ACT PLAY

BY DONALD A. MACKENZIE

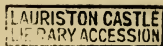
*Characters*WIDOW MACKAY, *tenant of Balree Croft.*MÀIRI¹ MACKAY, *her daughter, a domestic servant.*"SANDY" SPEEDWELL, *artist and poet, of Edinburgh.*MRS SPEEDWELL, *his mother.*

SCENE: The "best room" in a crofter's cottage in the Scottish Highlands. To the left a small open window, round which honeysuckle clings and blooms, affords a glimpse of a blue loch, softly screened by the drooping branches of a silver birch, and glistening in bright sunshine. Beside the window Màiri Mackay sits knitting a white shawl. A folding table, with the leaves down, occupies the centre of the room and is covered with a Mackay tartan plaid. Upon it stands a dark blue bowl filled with wild roses. Widow Mackay sits to the right, at her spinning wheel, between the table and a wide, open fire-place. Peat smoulders in the grate. To the left of the fire-place is an "easy chair" (a plain arm-chair with a cushion), and to the right a nursing chair with short legs; a stool is tilted in front on a deerskin rug. Against the wall, between the little window and a bedroom door, is a dark mahogany chest of drawers, on which lies a bulky family Bible between two gaudy vases. Three chairs are ranged against the wall to the left, and the floor is covered with flowery wax-cloth, brilliantly new. The walls are adorned with framed portraits of John Knox, John Bunyan, William Ewart Gladstone, and a Free Church minister. On the high mantelpiece squat two white porcelain dogs with black noses, and above it is a set of bagpipes. A "wag-at-the-wa" clock ticks leisurely to the right of the fireplace.

TIME: Early afternoon: a sunny day in late June.

WIDOW (*stops spinning and looks towards her daughter over her glasses*). You'll be sitting in a draught, Màiri. Shut the window or you will maybe catch a cheel²—you that looks so delicate.

MÀIRI. Oh! there's no fear of me, mother. If you won't be

¹ pron. Mah'ri.² chill.

minding, I would rather have the window open. I love to breathe the fresh air from the loch. (*Takes a deep breath.*) It's so refreshing after being in a stuffy city, and the honeysuckle smells so sweet. How quiet it is here ; you can listen to the quietness, so to speak.

WIDOW. Well, well, my treasure, have your own way with it. Balree is indeed a sweet place, and God's world is very beautiful. (*Stops spinning.*) Màiri, that honeysuckle was planted out there by your dear father, nineteen years ago, on the very day you came into the world. He'll be at his rest now three years come Martinmas, and every summer his beautiful flower will be growing and spreading and blooming. The smell of it goes to my heart like a sweet thought of him. (*Sighs and resumes her work at the spinning wheel, drawing out a thread and adjusting it.*) It's your own father that would be proud of you, Màiri, if he was still with us, but the Lord appointed otherwise. (*Sighs.*) His will be done. (*Goes on spinning.*)

[*Màiri rises from her chair, draws a tendril of honeysuckle through the window and smells it: then she plucks a blossom and puts it in her blouse. Musing, she leans her elbow on the window, chin on hand, gazing towards the loch. Her mother stops spinning, looks up and watches her daughter for a few seconds in silence.*]

WIDOW. You are very quiet, Màiri. How you have changed !

MÀIRI. I was only thinking to myself—just thinking a little.

WIDOW. It's me that sees a great difference in you—you that used to be such a cheery lassie, always laughing and teasing one and making the jokes. Many times, when you're away, I will be smiling here my lone self, thinking o' the things you used to be saying and doing. Now, I'll notice, and I canna' help noticing it, that you're changed so much. I suppose it's the city that does it. You'll have many things, no doubt, to be thinking over, and maybe, yes, maybe, you're feeling just a little dull, now, in this quiet place. . . . You'll often be sitting thinking to yourself in that way. Surely nosing¹ will be troubling you, m'eudail² ?

[*Màiri does not answer. She sits down, hangs her head and resumes knitting. Her mother rises, grasping her chin between her fingers, a look of concern on her face ; goes over to the window and sits besides her daughter.*]

WIDOW. And something is troubling you, Màiri, my own. You canna' hide it from me. There will be tears in your eyes, Ochone ! what will you be hiding in the deep heart of you ? You shouldn't be hiding anysing at all, at all, from me, your own mother.

¹ nothing.

² pron. mai'tl, *Gael.*, my treasure.

[Màiri shakes her head, takes out her handkerchief and dries her eyes.]

WIDOW (*very softly*). You are all I have left in this world—your father dead, your brother killed in the war in a foreign land far away. It would break my heart to think you would be keeping anysing from me. What is it? Tell me (*strokes the girl's hair*), dove of my heart! my fair love! . . . Màiri (*entreatingly*).

MÀIRI (*resuming her knitting*). It was only a foolish thought (*pause*)—a thought about one I shouldn't maybe be thinking of, now that I'm here.

WIDOW. Ah! has he—has *he* . . . turned false to you, now?

MÀIRI (*quickly*). Well, not what you would call false, not that altogether.

WIDOW. A lovers' quarrel, no doubt. You're young, you're young, but the young heart can feel sore. I mind well. I was once like you, Màiri. Your father and I had once a lover's quarrel. But it came all right. Lovers' quarrels are sometimes sweet to remember afterwards.

MÀIRI. It's not what you would call a quarrel either. But we've parted—parted for ever. But don't be worrying, mother, I'll maybe no' be caring so much as you would think.

WIDOW. Well, well, it's the way of the world. Maybe you'll change your mind yet. Maybe you wass just a little bit to blame yourself, now, eh? I wouldn't say you wass, Màiri, no, no. But girls—bonnie girls like yourself, my dove, will sometimes be doing things and saying things they'll no' quite intend altogether, and then they'll be thinking afterwards that it's maybe a pity it wasn't otherwise. . . . Is he a good lad, Màiri, steady at his work, no drinking, and always attending the church? Is he what you would call handsome, now, —big and manly like your father?

MÀIRI (*smiling*). No doubt he would have pleased you. If looks were everything, you'd be quite satisfied. He's a gentleman in every way.

WIDOW. A Highland lad, too, maybe, and of a good clan?

MÀIRI. Well, no' exactly what you would call Highland; but his grandfather was a Ross and he's proud of it.

WIDOW. So well he might be. There were some fine Rosses, although they were never like the Mackays, or my own clan, the great clan Donald. I would like to see your young man, Màiri. You'll make it up all right with him yet, eh?

MÀIRI. No, no; it's all past. He's fickle, mother—a poppy in the corn—a butterfly—one you would maybe like to look at, but not to depend on—changeable as the wind, and cruel

without knowing it—aye! (*Sighs.*) But don't be speaking about him. It's time I was beginning to forget there's such a one in the world.

WIDOW. Aye, so. . . . (*Looking through the window.*) There's Sandy coming.

MÀIRI (*rising quickly in alarm*). Who—who?

WIDOW. It's only Sandy, oor neighbour. He's coming to sow the turnips for me. Ah! Màiri, the neighbours will be very good to me since your father's death. Every one of them comes to do his share o' work on the croft and keep a roof above my head. I'll better be speaking to Sandy. (*Exit.*)

MÀIRI. Sandy. . . . Why should I have thought it was him? He does not know where I live, and, besides, he wouldn't come if he knew, except maybe to wound my heart deeper without knowing what he was doing. . . . Why did I tell mother? I can't explain everything to her. She cannot understand. Did Sandy's mother not tell me that he is not in my station of life, and that she would be disgraced if he married a servant—a servant in his mother's house. Oh! it's her that wounded my pride—her thinking she was better than me! a shop-keeper's wife (as if that were something great) and me a real Mackay, with lords and bards and great chiefs in my line. . . . Oh! if I only had the money, she wouldn't despise me so. But what's money? Money will not make one a lady. . . . I must forget, forget what was—forget Sandy and his mother and the rest.

WIDOW (*enters*). Sandy was asking when you will be going away. (*Sighs.*) I said I wasn't very sure. He's wondering you haven't been down to see his wife who was so ill last winter. Haste you, my dear, and be calling on her at once. She has been a good kind friend to me, Màiri.

MÀIRI. I'll go down just now, mother. But don't be speaking about me going away. (*Smiles.*) I have made up my mind to stay here with you always after this. You're getting old and canna' be left alone.

WIDOW. I wish you could aye be here, as you say. (*Sighs.*) But we're too poor, Màiri. It canna' be. We must bear our burdens in this world though our hearts should be breaking.

MÀIRI. I have a plan, mother, that will bring us money, and I'm going to give you a little surprise.

WIDOW. How can you make money here, lassie? Now, tell me that.

MÀIRI. Keeping visitors. Letting the house. I've thought of it for a long time, and that's why I brought you things for the house—the waxcloth, the new blankets, and the rest.

WIDOW (*amazed*). Keeping veesitors ?

MÀIRI. I saw how it was done last summer when we were holidaying near Oban. Oh ! the people in the west are clever at making the money in the summer.

WIDOW. Don't tell me they're cleverer in the west than in the north. Who ever heard of such a thing ? They haven't such land as our land.

MÀIRI. I know a widow near Oban—a Macdougall she is. Her son has a bicycle and her daughter has a piano. The croft is a poorer croft than our croft, and they have a slated roof, a porch at the door, registered grates, water taps in the kitchen, and a carpet in the best room.

WIDOW. How did they manage it ?

MÀIRI. The visitors, of course.

WIDOW. The veesitors !

MÀIRI. Ailie Macdougall is a nice girl, and she hasn't to go to service the whole year round like me. You see, they get so much money from the visitors that it keeps them and pays the rent.

WIDOW. I'm sure it's very good of the veesitors. But, Màiri, I wouldn't be beholden to anybody. I wouldn't take charity money, although I'm a poor widow, from any stranger, man or woman, however grand. No, no I couldn't think of it.

MÀIRI. You don't understand. The money is payment for rent and attendance. We'll let the house to visitors or take in lodgers, and charge maybe £12 a month with attendance.

WIDOW. But we canna' afford to slate the roof and get a piano and all the rest. You couldn't ask gentry to stay here, Màiri.

MÀIRI. You're wrong there, mother. It's fashionable for the city gentry to be staying now for holidays in "crofters' cottages," as they call them. They think houses like this are most artistic. They're quite right too. This is a finer house than any in a city—not so grand, of course, but more sweet and homely in every way. The gentry are beginning to know that. Oh ! mother, you would be surprised to see how they imitate us. . . . In the house where I was serving they had a spinning wheel and a three-legged pot in the drawing-room, cruises in the dining-room, horn spoons and wooden ladles, and old plates and bowls here and there and everywhere as ornaments. They will pay a lot of money for things we will just be throwing away. . . . Maybe they'll buy the old bagpipes. (*Laughs.*)

WIDOW. My grandfather's bagpipes—the bagpipes of a Gaelic bard ? No, no ; I'd sooner starve than part with a thing in

this house. Everything is covered with memories of my heart.

MÀIRI. I spoke to the Postmaster about letting the house. I wanted to give you a surprise. . . . I'll better be going to see Sandy's wife. Now, mother, if the visitors call when I'm out, you'll keep them speaking till I return. Don't take the first offer. Ask the highest terms you can. (*Draws a knitted shawl over her head.*) Now I'll be off.

WIDOW. Will you not be putting on your feather hat and your Sunday costume? The like o' that hat is no' to be seen in the glen.

MÀIRI. The shawl is sweeter. If I put on my best hat, people would think I was getting too proud. (*Exit.*)

WIDOW (*sits at spinning wheel*). It's a queer notion the lassie will have got into her head. But I must humour her. And so she's got a lad; and him and her have had a cast out. Poor lass! That'll no' last long. Blessings be on the dear heart of her! Any lad *my* Màiri would keep company with must be a good lad, and any lad that once set his eyes on *my* Màiri will no' be wanting to lose her. The treasure! . . . It's myself would be thankful to see her married decently and well. . . . I'm getting old, as her dear self would be saying. (*Sighs.*) My time will no' be long now.

[*Enter Mrs Speedwell, attired in summer costume. Of middle age. Has come from Edinburgh and is staying at the village hotel, a mile distant from Balree Croft. Looks at the widow, who is spinning.*]

MRS S. (*aside*). What a charming picture! How Sandy would love to paint her! This is the very house for Sandy. . . . (*Aloud*) Good afternoon, Mrs Mackay (*smiles*)—you're Mrs Mackay?

WIDOW. Pardon me, mem, I wass busy, and wouldn't be seeing you. Would you kindly sit down?

MRS S. Thank you. (*Sits down.*)

WIDOW. Will you be feeling the draught? I'll—I'll shut the window.

MRS S. (*aside*). A charming woman. (*Aloud.*) No thank you. The air is so delicately fresh here. This is a delightful district, Mrs Mackay.

WIDOW. It is very kind of you to be saying that. Balree has been my home for five and twenty years. When my man took me here I thought it the sweetest place on earth, next to my own glen, of course, and I'll be content to end my days in his house, the Lord willing.

MRS S. The Postmaster tells me you have rooms to let. My son

Memorandum

From

DONALD MACKAY,

WINE MERCHANT,

6 AND 7 LINDSAY PLACE,
AND 25 AND 27 CAUSEWAYSIDE,

❖ ❖ EDINBURGH.

To

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James Watson

Many thanks for the copy sent
in connection with the Great Exhibition, & enclosed
5 copies of the Standard Magazine 41st issue, &
sent to Glasgow. I have Watson's copy of the
May along with Mr. Macdonald's letter. which
is most interesting. Yours sincerely

James Watson

1887

1887

1887

1887

is anxious to stay in the country, and I think your cottage will suit him. He doesn't know I am here; the Postmaster wired to him yesterday saying he could get suitable rooms. ———



50 LEAMINGTON TERRACE,

EDINBURGH.

14th March 1914.

Dr Hew Morrison

Edin^g.

Dear Dr Morrison,

Your favour regarding the little play
"The Real Mackay." It gives me great pleasure
to allow the Tongue Literary Society to perform
it. As you are so well known in Sutherlandshire
I should like that you should advise the
applicant accordingly. I'd like to call on
Mr Donald Mackay & vice versa so at an
early date. The play was printed in the
'Dunedin Magazine' which is on sale at 6^d
(March number) & could be got through
any bookseller from Murray & Co (bookstalls)
I have only a few reprints for friends & beg
to enclose one for yourself as promised. They
are just to hand. As there are only four

This wife was a widow for 40 years + often
 told her children about "the cruel cruel
 evictions" + ^{repeated} ~~related~~ terrible stories about them which
 her husband used to ~~related~~ relate. William
 Mackay left home when his father married a
 second time. His father settled at Scotsburn, Delny.

Yours faithfully
 Donald Acland

PS

The "widow" in the play is my
 recollection of my grandmother + I have
 used up some of her sayings. *AM.*

is anxious to stay in the country, and I think your cottage will suit him. He doesn't know I am here; the Postmaster wired to him yesterday saying he could get suitable rooms. My son

3

His age ~~is~~ given on the tombstone makes his birth year 1798. My grandmother was only 17 when she married + Charles was well up in years. He may have been born before 1798.

My grandfather received letters from relations who had to emigrate to America. The ship in which they sailed put in to Cromarty owing to stormy weather + my mother, who is between 70 + 80, remembers the boats coming ashore + putting up at my grandfather's. When the ship sailed, the Cromarty people were moved to tears by the terrible keening raised by the heart-broken emigrants. She was only 3 or 4 years old at the time. My mother's recollection is that the Gaelic bard was her father's grandfather. As she never learned Gaelic, she can't tell anything about him, but "thanks" Rob Donn is the name. She says her father could recite a 20-
 4 birds
 7 Gaelic poems + sang ^{his} songs of his. He had a black fiddle which came from Shetlandshire, + was a Gaelic piper in Cromarty for 30 years.

players it will cost the Society just 2/- & they won't grudge that. The type has been distributed otherwise I should have got some extra copies.

If the Sullistons folk care for the play after reading it, I shall feel quite proud. I was brought up to understand that any ability I have got was of Sullistonshire & especially Mackay origin.

Re the Rob Donn tradition. An aunt says that my mother's family were named partly after the Mackays & partly after the Macleodys, thus about as follows

Family of William Mackay & Grace Janet Macleod.

- (1) William (after W Macleod & his father W Mackay)
- (2) Grace (after her Macleod grandmother)
- (3) Christina (after her Mackay grandmother)
- (4) Alexander (after Macleod uncle)
- (5) Isabel, my mother; (after Mackays)
- (6) Christina, (after Macleods)
- (7) John (after Mackays)

She says her father always boasted he was descended from a great Gaelic bard. They were not quite certain about his age when he died. It was much older than his wife.

is anxious to stay in the country, and I think your cottage will suit him. He doesn't know I am here ; the Postmaster wired to him yesterday saying he could get suitable rooms. My son wants to work in the Highlands during the summer and autumn.

WIDOW. To work here ? Well (*pause*), it's not easy to find work here. What will his business be ?

MRS. S. Oh ! he's a painter.

WIDOW. Indee ! Well, (*pause*) he will not get very much painting to do in this poor place, unless, maybe, of course, at the shooting lodge, but I'm afraid that it was painted in the spring.

MRS. S. (*laughing*). He's not a house painter, but an artist. He paints pictures, you understand.

WIDOW. Oh ! yes, yes ; I see, I see. I'll understand. . . . I'll be noticing some gentlemen drawing wonderful pictures here about in the summer, and some ladies also. And very clever they are, too. It's a gift—yes, a great gift, just like making songs and playing the pipes.

MRS. S. My son makes songs too—he's a poet, you know ; not that I can understand his poetry ; it's all Greek to me, but it amuses him, and that's everything.

WIDOW. He must be very clever. My grandfather was a fine poet.

MRS. S. Oh ! really. Sandy will be delighted. He'll be sure to buy a copy of your grandfather's book.

WIDOW. There is no book : his songs were never put in a book, but everybody sings them from Reay to Lochaber.

MRS. S. How interesting ! I'm sure you will be very friendly with my son. Perhaps you will make more of him than I can. His manner is irritating to me, and we're not very good friends at present.

WIDOW. I hope he's no' taking the drink.

MRS. S. Oh, no ! but the poor boy has a temperament.

WIDOW. A bad temper ?

MRS. S. No, he's not bad tempered, but very moody, inclined to be melancholy at times. And he's so unconventional. He wants to return to Nature, he says, and in trying to be natural he has grown quite eccentric. He's not like an ordinary city man at all.

WIDOW. Gentlemen are often strange in their ways. They have so little to do that they cannot help taking queer notions.

MRS. S. (*smiling*). Perhaps. He's tiresome at home but he's absolutely unbearable on a holiday ; he won't even dress himself decently. He makes one climb dreadful hills to see the sun setting or the moon rising, and is continually drawing



one's attention to the light falling here and there. He's in love with Nature, of course.

WIDOW. With whom did you say ?

MRS S. He's in love with the country, the fine scenery, and so on.

WIDOW. And why for no ? . . . God's beautiful world.

MRS S. I admire the country very much in the summer. It's so restful and sets one up so. But I can't understand how you exist during the winter season in this solitary place.

WIDOW. It's as beautiful in winter as in summer. Many times I will be looking through the window there to see the moon rising over the loch on a winter's night when the ground is white and sparkling and all the world is at peace. It is like a dream of Heaven.

MRS S. You have an eye for the beautiful, Mrs Mackay ; but you don't always get moonlight nights and clear days in the winter. (*Shrugging her shoulders.*)

WIDOW. Every day is different and every day has its own beauty, mem.

MRS S. You will get on splendidly with my son. I'm so glad I have come here. You set my mind at ease. I can quite see you will have a strong influence over him. So I had better let you into my little secret, and perhaps you will help me. My son is in love, Mrs Mackay, terribly in love. At least he thinks he is.

WIDOW. Indee !

MRS S. I shouldn't mind that so much. But he is in love with a girl far below him in rank. It worries me very much.

WIDOW. I see.

MRS S. (*confidentially*). Do you know he actually wanted to marry one of my servants—the tablemaid.

WIDOW. Surely she must be a very attractive girl.

MRS S. That's it. A pretty girl, naturally refined, an excellent servant, but not a suitable wife for a rich husband. A foolish marriage would ruin my son's social prospects. I could never hold up my head again if such a thing happened. So I had to put my foot down. I sent the girl away and told her my son had asked me to do so, but I told my son the girl had left of her own accord to free herself of his undesired attentions. It was a terrible thing to have to do.

WIDOW. A very terrible thing, indeet, to be telling what was maybe not true.

MRS S. Yes, it cost me a pang or two of conscience, but I knew it was for the best. The poor boy has suffered, but, as his sister says, he is recovering slowly. A spell of hard work will do him a lot of good. I hope you will help me by en-

couraging him to work, Mrs Mackay. Praise his work and keep him at it. Tell him he is improving every day. He likes to be praised. All artists and poets do ; they live on praise or the hope of praise. They prefer praise to money, poor fellows.

WIDOW. There are more desirable things in this world than money ; all we require of it is just a little for our daily needs.

MRS S. Which vary, of course. I hope you'll do your best to help me, Mrs Mackay. I feel I can trust you.

WIDOW. If I can do anything to help you, I'll do it, I'm sure. But it's little I can talk to him about, I'm afraid.

MRS S. (*smiling*). Discuss his soul with him. He is great on his soul.

WIDOW. I'm glad to hear that, mem, yes, I am indeet. I'll speak to our new minister about him ; he's a very earnest lad.

MRS S. I don't quite mean that. When my son speaks about his soul, he means his artistic impulses or his affections, or, perhaps, his affectations. For instance, when he is painting a picture, he talks about painting his soul. He says his poetry is full of soul. And, do you know, he called that servant girl "the companion of his soul."

WIDOW (*sighs*). Ochone ! It's a terrible way to be speaking about his eternal soul. (*Rocks herself with clasped hands.*)

MRS S. Yes, rather absurd, isn't it ? We old-fashioned people keep our souls for our religious life, of course ; for the church, not for the studio. But do not heed his little ways and his absurd remarks. Humour him and flatter him judiciously. That's what I always do. (*Rises.*) I think I'll walk to the station to meet him. He'll get a surprise to see me here. I want to be reconciled to the dear boy before I go on holiday myself. How far is it to the station, Mrs Mackay ?

WIDOW. It's two miles round by the road, but there's a short cut across the moor. (*Looking through the window.*) If you will ask the postman, who is just coming, to show you the way, he'll put you right. It's just a little over half a mile to the station by the short cut.

MRS S. Thank you so much. Good evening, Mrs Mackay. I'll see you later on. (*Exit.*)

WIDOW. A nice lady, but one that's needing to be spoken to very seriously about her own soul. I wonder what sort o' minister she'll be sitting under. She's no' afraid to be telling lies to her son and her servant for fear they will get married, and maybe they'll be very fond of one another. It's doing the devil's work to come between young people in love ; and if they're meant for one another it's no' her or anybody else will keep them apart. . . . I wonder what Màiri will say when I

tell her. . . . And, oh ! dear me, Màiri will not be pleased with me. I never said a word about money. I never thought on such a thing. And worst of all, I never asked the lady her name. Am I no' the stupid one ?

[*Motor horn sounds in the distance.*]

I wonder who that will be. The doctor, very likely. Somebody must be ill. (*Looking through the window.*) It's no' the doctor, but a strange gentleman coming this way. It canna' be the lady's son, for he's coming by train. This will be another veesitor, but he's too late. I wish Màiri was here. I'm no' fit to be speaking to the veesitors.

[*Enter Sandy Speedwell.*]

WIDOW. Good day to you, sir, I'm ferry glad to see you, indeet. Will you be taking a chair ?

SANDY. I'm your lodger, Mrs Mackay. I had a wire from the Postmaster and motored here with a friend. This is a beautiful glen.

WIDOW. I hope there's no mistake. Will you be the gentleman who is a painter and a poet too ?

SANDY (*astonished*). Really you surprise me, madam. What little bird has been carrying tales about me ? I thought I had reached the back of the world.

WIDOW. A lady called here, sir, and was telling me. But——

SANDY. A lady ? What lady ? (*Anxiously.*) Your niece, your daughter, your cousin—who is she, what is she ? A young lady or an old lady ?

WIDOW (*smiling*). No relation of mine, sir. You'll soon be seeing her yourself. Maybe I'll better go and tell her you are here. She's neither young nor old, but somesing between the two. (*Aside.*) I musn't be telling him it was his own mother.

SANDY. No, don't go. I'm in no mood to meet any of my acquaintances. (*Aside.*) Those prying gossips ! One can't go a step for them. (*Aloud.*) I prefer to talk to yourself, Mrs Mackay, but I must ask you to do me a special favour.

WIDOW. I'm at your service, sir.

SANDY. *Don't* call me "sir." My name is Sandy.

WIDOW. Indeet. A very homely name indeet, *sir*—I beg your pardon—there will be one or two Sandys in this same glen already.

SANDY. Splendid ! I'll be able to hide myself. If anybody calls here asking for Sandy, you'll send them to some other Sandy. . . . (*Gazes steadily at Mrs Mackay.*) Look through the window, Mrs Mackay.

WIDOW (*alarmed*). What is it ?

SANDY. Sit down, please, don't move. You make an excellent

picture. Just look towards the window. (*Widow looks nervously.*) Ah! wonderful; she was Spring, you are late September. (*Sighs.*) I must paint you.

WIDOW (*astonished*). Paint me?

SANDY. I will paint your portrait and present it to you afterwards.

WIDOW (*aside*). Màiri said the veesitors were so kind to people.

(*Aloud.*) That's very good of you, Mr——

SANDY. Sandy.

WIDOW. Mr Sandy.

SANDY. No, simply Sandy. (*Laughs.*) Simple Sandy, if you like, or just Sandy.

WIDOW (*aside*). So simple and plain; he must be a born gentleman. (*Aloud.*) I'll be trying to remember. (*Smiles.*)

SANDY (*musingly*). What is there in you Highland people that makes you seem all alike, I wonder? When you smile, you remind me of—of someone I knew. A Highland lady also. (*Aside.*) Ah! dear me, can I never get her out of my mind?—Màiri, Màiri, my soul calls you. You haunt me night and day. (*Aloud.*) This is a very beautiful little house. What a rare window! And this fire-place! (*Sits down on a stool.*)

WIDOW. Take the easy chair, if you please. I'm sure you're feeling tired.

SANDY. Is that your most comfortable chair, Mrs Mackay?

WIDOW (*stiffly*). Yes, it will be, but maybe by next year——

SANDY. Then come and sit in it, please, and speak to me. I'm dull, madam. (*Sighs.*)

WIDOW (*pokes up the peat*). It's a poor fire, indeet, and there's nothing so cheery as a bright fire. I hope you'll be excusing the old fire-place, but maybe by next year we'll have a registered grate. (*Sits down.*)

SANDY. (*standing up*). Heavens! don't speak about such a thing, never think of changing your grate. It's perfect, madam. (*Smiles.*) I must paint this fire-place, and you must sit beside it at your spinning wheel. (*Glances round the room.*) I will give you some pictures to hide those on the wall—those frowning fellows—pah!

WIDOW (*aside*). I must mind to be humouring him. (*Aloud.*) You are too kind, indeet. But first I will give you something to eat. (*Rises.*)

SANDY. Sit down, Mrs Mackay. I'm not hungry. Please do not go away. (*Gazes in her face.*) Do sit down. (*Aside.*) How like Màiri she is. I seem to see Màiri everywhere, yet I cannot see her.

WIDOW. I'm afraid you'll have to be excusing me. I have to go

for a little message, but I'll not be long. I'm sure you will be excusing me, now.

SANDY. I beg your pardon, Mrs Mackay. It's selfish of me to detain you.

WIDOW (*smiling*.) I'll soon be back. (*Aside*.) I must hurry after his mother and tell her. The poor lad is eating out his heart because he has quarrelled with her. (*Aloud*.) Be amusing yourself till I return, Mr Sandy—I mean Sandy. (*Aside*.) I'll better hurry and get back before Màiri comes. (*Exit*.)

SANDY (*Alone. Sits before the fire on the low stool. Elbows on knees and face between his hands*.) I cannot escape Màiri. Everywhere I go I think of Màiri. (*Takes a sheet of note-paper from his pocket and reads*):

Star of my soul, can I forget ?
I dreamed not that my star would set.
Ah ! now my heaven is dim and bare,
Thou wert so bright, thou wert so fair—
Dwells falsehood in such eyes as thine ?
Came poison from thy lips divine ?
My soul is——

Pah ! What mockery—jingling mockery !

[*Flings his poem in the fire. As the flame leaps up the door opens and Màiri enters. Sandy looks round, utters an exclamation of surprise : stands up, faces Màiri. The lovers gaze at one another, amazed and silent for a few seconds.*]

SANDY. Màiri. . . . You ?

MÀIRI (*with emotion*). Why—why have you—have you followed me here ?

SANDY. I have been searching for you everywhere, but——

MÀIRI. Oh ! leave me alone. Why, why ?—Have you seen my mother ? Where is she ?

SANDY. She has just gone out, but will return soon.

MÀIRI. I'll go after her.

SANDY (*strides forward and seizes Màiri's hand*). Oh ! do not leave me like that, Màiri. Will you not speak to me, if not for my own sake, at least for the sake of old times ?

MÀIRI. Why should you want to be speaking to me ? Your mother told me what you said. Do you think I can forget so soon ? Let me go. . . .

SANDY. Màiri, what do you mean ? What did my mother tell you ?

MÀIRI. Ah ! do not be fooling me. You may have fooled me in *your* mother's house, but you'll never fool me in *my* mother's house.

SANDY. Fooling you? I don't understand. . . . Is this your home, Màiri?

MÀIRI (*raising herself stiffly*). Well you know whose house you are in. (*Drawing her hand away.*) Now, leave it! and never darken our door again. I am not your servant any longer, sir.

SANDY. If you ask me to go, I certainly will. But before I do, let me tell you this, Màiri: I have never asked my mother to say anything to you about me.

MÀIRI. Perhaps not. But she told me all. . . . Are you going now?

SANDY (*brokenly*). Màiri, do not break my heart. Do not spurn me, as if I were a leper. Oh, Màiri, if you must send me away, once again, let us part as friends. . . . Why, oh why, did you not tell me yourself that you had grown tired of me? Why did you ask my mother to repeat your cruel words?

MÀIRI. Your mother? My mother? I never gave any message to your mother.

SANDY. Never gave. . . . Has my mother lied to me? . . . When I returned from my holiday and found you had gone, I was broken-hearted, and what I felt most and feel most is that you never even left a letter for me. If only you had, I should have been better able to bear it. . . .

MÀIRI. I'll just ask you one question before you go. What did you tell your mother to say to me?

SANDY. Nothing! I never spoke to her about you after I told her we were engaged, until that black evening when she seared my soul with your message—the message she said you left for me.

[*Màiri sinks in a chair, covers her eyes with her hand, and sobs.*]

SANDY. Màiri, Màiri, I love you more than ever. Forgive me if I have offended you! Have pity on me! I have never loved another. I will never love another. (*Kneels before her.*) If you cannot love me, do not despise me. If you wish me to go away, do not let us part except as old friends. (*Entreatingly.*) Màiri, speak to me, Màiri.

[*Màiri suddenly takes his head in her hands and kisses his forehead.*]

SANDY. My love, I cannot leave you now.

[*They gaze at one another in silence.*]

MÀIRI. Then it is not true that you wished to leave me?

SANDY. No, no, Màiri. And it's not true that you had grown tired of me?

MÀIRI. Tired of you, Sandy? The heart of me has been hungering for you day and night since last we parted.

[*Voices are heard outside.*]

SANDY. Your mother is coming. (*Looks through the window.*) Heavens! my mother is with her.

MÀIRI. Your mother ? . . . Oh ! let me hide myself.

SANDY. I don't wish to see her either. I shall never speak to her again. Where can we go ?

MÀIRI. To the kitchen. We can slip out after they come in here.
Exit Sandy and Màiri. Enter Mrs Mackay supporting Mrs Speedwell, who is limping; she has met with an accident and is slightly hysterical.]

WIDOW. Be sitting down, mem. Try to compose yourself.

MRS S. Thank you, Mrs Mackay, you are so kind—oh ! dear, dear, where is my son ?

WIDOW. He must have gone out to look at the scenery. He'll soon be back, I'm sure. Just you settle down nicely now, mem. I'll bathe your foot for you. I'll better be putting the big kettle on the kitchen fire. (*Exit. Voices heard within. . . .*) Are you here, Màiri dear ? And Mr Sandy, too ?

MRS S. (*starting*). Sandy and Màiri. Can it be ?—

WIDOW (*re-enters*). I'm sorry, mem, but—but (*with agitation*) I cannot understand—your son refuses to come in.

MRS S. (*rising*). Then I will go to my son.

[*Limps towards the door, sees her son and Màiri.*]

MRS S. Sandy. . . . Màiri. . . . come here—come here at once. Do not go out and leave me in misery. I wish to speak to you both.

[*Sandy and Màiri enter. Both look stern and defiant.*]

MRS S. Let me sit down. I want to speak to my son and Màiri.

[*Widow assists her towards the arm-chair.*]

WIDOW (*addressing her daughter*). Is this your young man, Màiri dear ?

MÀIRI (*hiding her face in Sandy's arm*). Yes, mother (*faintly*).

WIDOW (*nervously*). I think I will better be putting the big kettle on the kitchen fire. (*Walks towards the door.*)

MRS S. No, no, come back ; please sit down, Mrs Mackay. I wish you to hear all I have got to say.

[*Mrs Mackay sits opposite Mrs Speedwell, who is in the "easy chair." Sandy and Màiri stand beside the table, arm in arm.*]

MRS S. (*addressing Mrs Mackay*). When you found me lying helplessly on the moor, my sprained ankle sinking into a bog, I thanked you and you said, "It's not me you should be thanking, but Providence." You were right there, Mrs Mackay. The hand of Providence arranges all things. Providence brought me here to be punished for my sin ; Providence brought these two together (*pointing to Sandy and Màiri*) at the same time. . . . When I was lying on that dreadful lonely moor, expecting to meet an awful death—

to die there alone—the thoughts that were uppermost in my mind were about my sin against your daughter and my own son. Now I am going to ask their forgiveness.

SANDY (*impulsively, hastening towards her*). No, no. Don't ask my forgiveness (*kisses her*), but Màiri's only.

MRS S. (*turning to Màiri*). Màiri dear (*entreatingly and softly*). [*Sandy goes towards Màiri and leads her to his mother.*]

MRS S. Kiss me, my . . . daughter.

[*Sandy grasps Mrs Mackay's hand. The old woman rises to her feet.*]

SANDY (*gleefully*). My mother has robbed you of your daughter. Let me take her place and be your son.

WIDOW (*with emotion*). Be you a good man to my Màiri, for my Màiri has been a good daughter to me.

[*Màiri comes forward and kisses her mother.*]

SANDY (*taking Màiri's arm*). Come on! hurry, hurry! Let us boil the big kettle on the kitchen fire.

[*Màiri smiles radiantly and Mrs Speedwell laughs. The widow sinks into a chair.*]

MRS S. Dear Mrs Mackay, but for my sore foot I think I would dance to you. (*Màiri and Sandy turn at the door and laugh. The widow smiles.*)

(CURTAIN)

Fig 1

